Cogitare Enfermagem

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Making children vulnerable on social media: a study of the repercussions of sharenting

HIGHLIGHTS

1. Sharenting intensifies children's vulnerability in digital spaces.
2. Online exposure causes lasting legal and psychosocial harm.
3. Nursing as a strategic agent in safeguarding digital childhood.
4. Parental awareness and education about the risks of sharenting.

Karen Stefany Pereira Celestino[1]
Fihama Pires Nascimento[2]
Lindemberg Arruda Barbosa[2]
Ana Luiza Cabral da Cunha de Almeida Chagas[2]
Renata Clemente dos Santos-Rodrigues[3]
Emanuella de Castro Marcolino[4]

ABSTRACT

Objective: To assess how the phenomenon of sharenting contributes to making children vulnerable on social media. **Method:** This documentary, qualitative study analyzed news stories about sharenting published in "O Globo," "Folha," "O Estadão," and "BBC" from January 1, 2020, to January 31, 2024, using the *Interface de R pour les Analyses Multidimensionnelles de Textes et de Questionnaires* software. Lexicographic analysis of the textual corpus of 15 news stories yielded four thematic classes focused on exposure and privacy rights, perspectives on technology use, maternal presence in virtual spaces and its impact on children, and guidance for safe internet use. **Results:** Sharenting exposes children to dangers such as invasion of privacy, cyberbullying, and online crimes. **Final considerations:** Parents must be made aware of and educated about the risks of exposing minors, and safety measures must be promoted.

DESCRIPTORS: Privacy; Social Media; Child Abuse; Forensic Nursing; Media Exposure.

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[1]UNIFACISA - Centro Universitário, Campina Grande, Paraíba, Brasil.
[2]Universidade Federal da Paraíba, Campus I, João Pessoa, Paraíba, Brasil.
[3]Universidade Estadual da Paraíba, Campus I, Campina Grande, Paraíba, Brasil.
[4]Universidade Federal de Campina Grande, Campus Cuité, Cuité, PB, Brasil.

INTRODUCTION

By definition, "sharenting" is an English term that combines *share* and *parenting* and refers to the act of sharing one's parenting online. This sharing consists of posting photos, data, routines, and videos of one's own children without the possibility of consent[1].

Generally, the intentions behind this behavior are not negative. Parents share information and images of their children mainly to record childhood moments, keep in touch with family and friends, document child development, and seek support or social validation. However, this behavior can become excessive, since the benefits parents perceive often outweigh consideration of the risks related to privacy, the construction of the child's digital identity, and exposure in the online environment.[2]

Studies indicate that approximately 81% of children living in the West have a virtual presence before the age of 2. In the US, this figure rises to 92%, and it falls to 73% in Europe. On Facebook, the same study found that 63.7% of parents who are users post photos of their children that are defined as embarrassing (showing the child naked, half-naked, or in funny or messy situations, particularly with food)[3].

In addition, data show that 67.2% of mothers use social media more frequently for the purpose of sharing and that they do so weekly in 39.8% of cases[4]. On the other hand, the same study points to a critical view: 66.9% of participants agree that exposing children on social media has harmful effects and threatens their privacy, opening the door to the circulation of images on inappropriate platforms. Moreover, 86.9% of respondents consider this phenomenon a form of neglect or even abuse.

Given this context, the Ministry of Health established the National Policy for Comprehensive Child Health Care (*Política Nacional de Atenção Integral à Saúde da Criança* – PNAISC)[5] to promote, protect, and restore the health of minors, with the aim of reducing vulnerabilities and risks for diseases and health problems.

Under Law No. 7.498, which regulates the practice of Nursing in Brazil, nurses are responsible for conducting child-focused consultations as part of longitudinal care. This practice, also guided by the PNAISC, highlights the need for a commitment to child safety through guidance and health education for parents and guardians[6].

This study is therefore justified by the need to understand how sharenting contributes to making children vulnerable on social media, given the scarcity of scientific evidence on this topic and the growing importance of social media in family life.

To contribute to the scientific literature on this topic and to develop more effective preventive and educational measures to protect children's integrity in an increasingly digital environment, we asked: how does the phenomenon of sharenting contribute to making children vulnerable on social media? This manuscript therefore aims to assess how the phenomenon of sharenting contributes to making children vulnerable on social media.

METHOD

This is a documentary, interpretive study with a qualitative approach. Documentary research draws on primary sources of various kinds that have not yet undergone analytical interpretation[7] but can be reanalyzed to yield new interpretations, whereas the qualitative approach is a reflective and interpretive process aimed at understanding experiences from the standpoint of lived reality[8].

The study was based on the analysis of journalistic content published in four widely circulated outlets: "O Globo," "Folha," "O Estadão," and "BBC," selected according to national and international circulation criteria and recognized for their daily updates, broad audience reach, and the availability of search tools on their websites.

Data were collected between April and May 2024 and covered material published from January 1, 2020, to January 31, 2024, addressing situations involving the exposure of children up to 12 years of age in the digital environment. The time frame took into account the intensified use of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period of increased digital exposure of children and greater media coverage of events related to sharenting and child protection in virtual settings.

Materials aimed at other age groups, opinion pieces, duplicates across sources, and news stories that addressed the topic only tangentially, with no direct relation to the research objectives, were not included.

To access the news stories, electronic press clipping was performed and temporary subscriptions to the selected newspapers were obtained. The news stories were initially screened using the key terms "sharenting," "child digital kidnapping," "haters with children," "children's online privacy," and "online harassment against children"; these were applied separately in the search tool of each homepage.

In O Globo, 20 news stories were identified for "sharenting," zero for "child digital kidnapping," one for "haters with children," zero for "children's online privacy," and zero for "online harassment against children," totaling 21 news stories. In Estadão, 10 news stories were identified for "sharenting"; 14 for "child digital kidnapping"; 23 for "haters with children"; 42 for "children's online privacy"; and 33 for "online harassment against children," totaling 122 news stories.

In Folha, nine news stories were identified for "sharenting"; three for "child digital kidnapping"; 23 for "haters with children"; 71 for "children's online privacy"; and 136 for "online harassment against children," totaling 242 news stories. In the BBC, 20 news stories were identified: two related to "sharenting," three to "child digital kidnapping," six to "haters with children," four to "children's online privacy," and five to "online harassment against children."

A total of 405 records were initially identified, of which 305 were excluded for not addressing the study topic: 12 from O Globo, 85 from Estadão, 194 from Folha, and 14 from the BBC. After this step, four duplicate records were identified, leaving 96 texts for full reading; 15 items were ultimately selected for the sample: O Globo (8), Folha (5), Estadão (1), and BBC (1).

The final selection considered textual density, understood as the availability of substantive and sufficient information to form units of meaning relevant to the scope of the research. Data collection ended when new news stories merely reproduced content and meanings already present, adding no new elements relevant to understanding the phenomenon under investigation.

Each document was assigned an alphanumeric code composed of the sequential number of the news story and its predominant theme. The database was then structured and tabulated in Microsoft Word to better organize the data.

The news stories were coded as a textual corpus and processed using the *Interface de R pour les Analyses Multidimensionnelles de Textes et de Questionnaires* (IRAMUTEQ®) software. Basic lexicography was performed first, including calculation of frequency, the chi-square test with a cutoff of $x^2>3.84$, and the distribution of active forms. Descending Hierarchical Classification (DHC) was then applied, a technique that groups text segments with similar vocabulary, as well as their divergences and

individual characteristics, making it possible to identify lexical classes representative of the corpus [9].

The results then underwent interpretation through Bardin's thematic content analysis, relating the classes obtained by the software to the meanings expressed in the journalistic discourse and to the study objectives. The classes were named and organized into categories, which made it possible to grasp the senses, meanings, and discursive patterns in the news stories, understood as social productions that reflect and construct representations of the phenomenon under investigation[10].

As a documentary study, this manuscript did not require submission to a Research Ethics Committee, pursuant to Resolution No. 510 of the National Health Council.

RESULTS

A textual corpus was built from the collected materials and then processed by DHC, yielding 15 texts, 342 text segments (TS), 12,263 lexical occurrences, 1,944 active forms, and a retention rate of 72.81%. The material resulting from the analysis was categorized into four classes with their respective text segments: Class 1 with 63 TS (25.3%); Class 2 with 74 TS (29.72%); Class 3 with 49 TS (19.68%); and Class 4 with 63 TS (25.3%), as shown in Figure 1.

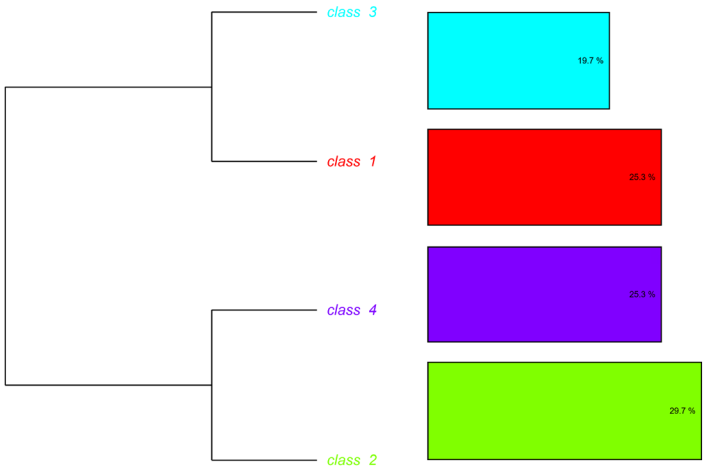

Figure 1. Dendrogram of the DHC of the corpus of online news content on sharenting. Campina Grande, PB, Brazil, 2024

Source: The authors (2024).

The four classes resulting from the DHC are divided into two subcategories, A and B, which together make up the full textual corpus. The first, subcategory A, is titled "Children's privacy in the technological era" and comprises Classes 2 and 4. Class 2 (Sharenting and online privacy rights) addresses the excessive exposure of children through sharenting and the privacy rights guaranteed to the children involved; Class 4 (Positive and negative perspectives on the use of technology in relation to children's exposure) demonstrates the opposing sides of technology use, such as the related benefits and harms.

The second, subcategory B, is titled "Maternal posts and digital safety" and is divided into Classes 1 and 3. Class 1 (Aspects of maternal presence on social media and impacts on children) focuses on mothers' behaviors on social media and the results of this practice, such as interactions, which may be positive or negative. Class 3 (Measures

for safe internet use) consists of prevention and safety guidance for parents' use of social media in relation to their children. It also shows the negative consequences of exposing minors.

Figure 2 below presents a diagram with the word list detailing these classes and how they are organized.

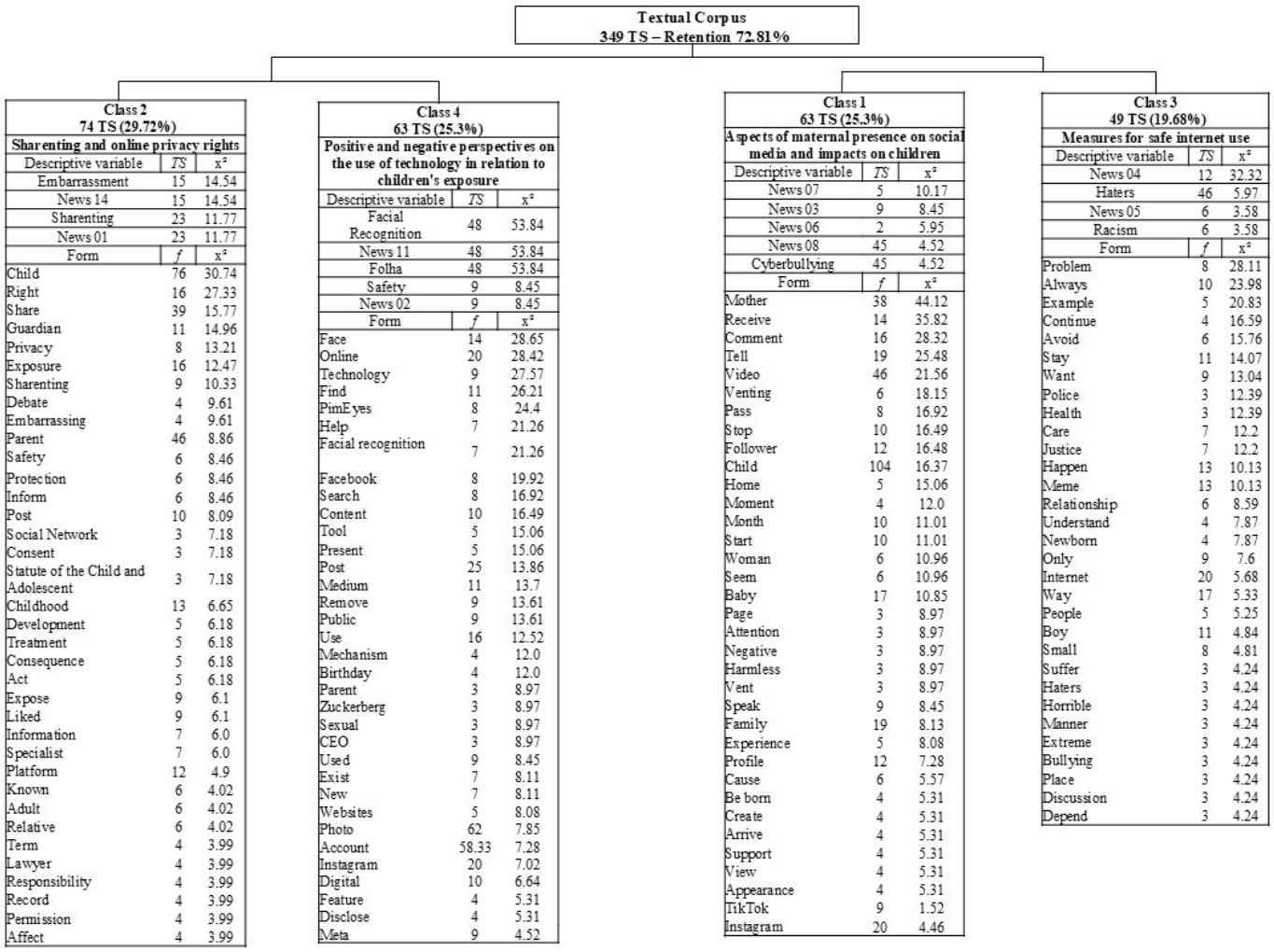

Figure 2. Diagram of the classes emerging from the dendrogram of the textual corpus of the news stories collected on sharenting. Campina Grande, PB, Brazil, 2024

Legend: TS – number of text segments; f – number of text segments containing the word in the class; x² - chi-square of the association between the word and the class p

Source: The authors (2024).

A- CHILDREN'S PRIVACY IN THE TECHNOLOGICAL ERA

Class 2 - Sharenting and online privacy rights

In Class 2, the significant descriptive variables were "embarrassment," "News," and "sharenting." The content of the news stories in this category concerns the excessive exposure of children on social media, amounting to sharenting behavior and raising questions about the rights guaranteed by law regarding children's online privacy, as the following excerpts show:

It is appalling that, in the no-holds-barred pursuit of likes, children and young people are exposed to humiliating situations by their own relatives before an audience impossible to measure, since these videos and photos can be downloaded from the platforms and stored and shared through messaging apps. (News 14)[11]

That is why parents and guardians must be cautious about sharing. In them, it must be considered that babies and children cannot yet choose whether they want their photos shared or not. In other words, there is no consent. (News 01)[12]

The debate around this is not recent either; for years people have discussed whether the act of posting photos of one's children on the internet, known as sharenting, can be classified as an invasion of privacy, since children obviously cannot consent or refuse to consent to the exposure. (News 14)[11]

A year ago, she filed a police report on the case with the Civil Police of Rio de Janeiro, the state where the family lives. In the document, she reports that her daughter's photo was being used in a derogatory way and without the consent of those responsible for the child. (News 08)[13]

There is no justification for the attacks committed by those who feel entitled to post any malicious comment simply because a child appears in an image or video shared with the public. (News 15)[14]

Class 4 - Positive and negative perspectives on the use of technology in relation to children's exposure

In Class 4, the associated variables were "facial recognition," "News," "Folha Newspaper," and "safety." The main focus of the components of this category is perspectives on technology use, emphasizing facial recognition and artificial intelligence tools, which have both positive and negative uses. They also show possible dangers involved in using social media and exposing one's children. The selected excerpts below illustrate these points:

In addition to images being leaked to criminal websites, there is also the risk of children being monitored with the help of facial recognition tools such as PimEyes, which performs reverse photo searches. (News 13)[15]

Artificial intelligence increases the danger of posting photos of one's children on social media. Features that perform facial recognition can be used by criminals and abusers. There are two distinct types of parental behavior on "TikTok." (News 11)[16]

Historically, the main criticism of parents who overshare online has been the invasion of their children's privacy. Advances in artificial intelligence-based technologies now present new ways for ill-intentioned people to misappropriate children's online content. (News 11)[16]

Also according to the mother, the child's face was edited to make it look as if she were wearing makeup. The danger is global, according to internet research monitoring illegal activity in the digital environment. (News 13)[15]

B- MATERNAL POSTS AND DIGITAL SAFETY

Class 1 - Aspects of maternal presence on social media and impacts on children

In Class 1, the following variables were significantly evoked: "News" and "Cyberbullying." The content of this category concerns mothers' presence on social media through the exposure of their children, as well as the interactions generated as posts are made. These exchanges may be positive or negative, which makes them relevant to discuss.

In a video responding to the cruel comments, she appears holding her daughter and lip-syncing to a song. Despite the unpleasant comments she usually receives, in

this video many people were kind, praising her and reinforcing that she seems to be an amazing mother. (News 03)[17]

They insulted her appearance, wished horrible things on her, and I read comments like: if that were my child, I'd kill them, says the mother in an excerpt from the video; she recorded the outburst in a moment of despair. (News 08)[13]

The clicks that seemed harmless turned into a real nightmare for the family when the mother discovered an Instagram account with more than 5,000 followers that had countless photos of her children. (News 07)[18]

I don't even have the strength anymore to justify that I wasn't wrong to post my daughter, it was an ordinary video, the ones in the wrong are the monsters who started attacking my daughter's appearance without thinking that there is a family, a mother, and a child behind this. (News 08)[13]

Class 3 - Measures for safe internet use

In Class 3, the specific variables obtained were "Haters," "News," and "Racism." The linguistic content of this class highlights guidance on prevention and safety promotion and emphasizes the repercussions of exposing children on social media. Technology and social media have many contributions to offer. These benefits, however, do not cancel out all the risks involved in their use. The selected excerpts below emphasize the need for care and prevention:

That is why parents and guardians must be cautious about sharing. In them, it must be considered that babies and children cannot yet choose whether they want their photos shared or not, that is, there is no consent. (News 01)[12]

We have some concerns, but with day-to-day life some things end up slipping through. One example is school: some people are careful not to post school uniforms for fear of kidnapping. (News 04)[19]

Most of the children exposed in this type of post have features of Black origin. According to the lawyer, the case of the exposure of the girl's image may be considered a crime against honor and stalking, as well as systematic intimidation, an act of physical or psychological violence. (News 08)[13]

The fact that you can steal someone's photo in a few clicks and then use it for whatever you want is worrying. (News 11)[16]

DISCUSSION

The practice of sharenting places two fundamental rights in conflict: parents' freedom of expression and children's right to privacy. Both rights are limited and must be analyzed case by case, which means that parents are protected by freedom of expression but that this freedom may be restricted after the fact. In addition, the law allows parents to guide their children toward appropriate development. However, comprehensive protection prioritizes the interests of children because they are still developing. Although the Judiciary regards parents as the best guardians of their children's privacy, it may intervene in cases of violations by those responsible for the child[20].

In the "Bel para Meninas" case, the parents were brought before the courts to answer for the improper exposure and violation of their daughter's privacy and were

ordered to remove content that caused embarrassment. This example illustrates how the Judiciary can recognize and act against abuses committed by those responsible for the child, demonstrating the need for careful and balanced analysis of parents' rights and children's interests.

Children cannot give valid consent, so the decision falls to their parents. Beyond providing information, parents need to understand how far the data they provide may travel. Only on this basis should they consent, or not, to exposing their children on social networks. What makes this situation so important is that data shared online continue to exist long afterward; in other words, a post made in childhood may endure throughout the person's life[21].

Furthermore, parents or guardians generally do not know how platforms will use their children's personal data, even after giving consent. Clicking "I accept" when signing up for a network does not guarantee true informational autonomy or full clarity about how these data are processed[21].

In addition, Brazil's General Data Protection Law (LGPD)[22] seeks to protect the personal data of children and adolescents, stipulating that such data must be processed in the best interests of these individuals, in accordance with the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA).

We also found that, in some cases of exposure, there were legal consequences and possible related crimes. Brazilian Law No. 14.811 can be used with the authorities to ensure protection for victims of this type of behavior, which is considered a crime, as well as appropriate intervention so that such practices do not go unpunished.

In this context, nurses play a strategic role as health education agents and can guide children, adolescents, and families on the risks associated with the digital environment, including privacy, exposure of personal information, and online safety[23].

The rapid pace of technological innovation and the growing incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) across different sectors of society call for greater attention to its use and to the processing of personal data. Although AI has great potential to drive innovation and generate benefits, its use can also lead to misuse, privacy violations, and other ethical risks when implemented without adequate governance mechanisms[24].

It is therefore essential to recognize that these risks do not cancel out the benefits of technology but reinforce the need to understand the mechanisms involved in its development and implementation, promoting ethical, responsible, and safe use[24].

The literature indicates that the benefits of sharing content involving one's children include connecting with other people, close or not, and interacting through comments, which tend to be positive. This type of response from internet users provides engagement and a sense of welcome and support, encouraging parents to keep posting about their lives and their children[21].

However, as observed, not all comments published in virtual environments are positive or harmless, which favors episodes of cyberbullying, characterized by aggressive behavior carried out by electronic means with the intent to harm the victim and generally associated with a power imbalance and repetition. In the digital context, a single comment, image, or post can be continually shared and remain accessible, prolonging and amplifying its harmful effects on the victim[25].

Under Law No. 14.811 of January 2024, bullying in virtual environments is classified as a crime, defined as intentional, repetitive, systematic intimidation without justifiable motive occurring in a digital medium (social network, app, online game, or live broadcast on platforms). In proven cases, the law imposes a penalty of imprisonment of 2 to 4 years and a fine, unless the act is associated with other, more serious crimes[26].

This behavior is committed predominantly by the so-called "haters." In addition to this type of behavior, recent episodes illustrate the tangible dangers associated with excessive sharing.

As observed, excessive exposure can lead to the creation of an unauthorized and unwanted digital identity for children. It is important to recognize that, when we share personal information and images online, we are contributing to the construction of a digital profile, often without full awareness of the long-term consequences[2].

Given the challenges posed by the growing presence of children and adolescents in digital environments, it is essential to adopt protection mechanisms capable of ensuring their rights in the virtual sphere. In Brazil, Law No. 15.211/2025, known as the Digital Statute of the Child and Adolescent, represents a regulatory advance by establishing guidelines for protecting this population in the digital environment, including aspects related to privacy, personal data protection, safety, and the prevention of risks associated with the use of information technologies[27].

Recent research indicates that social media have negatively influenced mental health and are a significant factor in the rise of mental illness among adolescents and young adults over the past twenty years, particularly depression and anxiety[28]. This shows that situations such as those described above can lead to severe consequences for mothers' psychological well-being.

Moreover, these factors not only negatively affect mothers' mental health but also create a considerable emotional burden. This burden is evident in the results of the news analysis, which often attribute most of the responsibility for sharenting to mothers in the cases cited.

However, under the ECA[29] (Law No. 8.069/1990), parents or legal guardians are responsible for ensuring the well-being and protection of minors. In other words, if the practice of sharenting has any consequences for the child, the responsibility lies with both of those involved.

The findings in this class reveal the complexities and challenges of sharenting, highlighting the emotional and social impacts of exposing children on social media. The criticism faced by mothers and children, invasions of privacy, and cyberbullying show the need for greater awareness and regulation to protect children's privacy and well-being in the digital environment.

To minimize these risks, studies emphasize adopting strategies aimed at protecting privacy in the digital environment, including managing social media security settings, controlling who can access shared information, and carefully evaluating the data made available online. In addition, caution is recommended when disclosing personal information and location data, given that excessive exposure can increase vulnerabilities related to users' privacy and security[30]. By adopting these habits, it is possible to mitigate risks, including those from haters, identity theft, and cyberbullying.

The discussion of this topic and of measures for safe internet use highlights the importance of guidance and awareness for the protection of minors. From this perspective, nurses are well placed to act as mediators in this role, since, as health professionals, they play a crucial part in health education and in guiding families[6].

The protection of children is fully supported by the ECA, established by Law No. 8.069/1990. It sets out the fundamental rights of children and adolescents and guarantees comprehensive protection in all aspects of minors' lives, including in virtual settings[29].

Educational interventions led by nurses show potential to increase awareness of digital privacy and strengthen protective practices in the use of technology[23]. By promoting health through guidance on safe internet use, especially in the context of

sharenting, nurses help give effect to the rights and protection of children provided for in the ECA, fostering healthy and safe development.

The notion that the internet is a space free from accountability does not hold, since there is a legal framework in force to curb and punish harmful conduct. However, public misinformation favors impunity and the perpetuation of harm, reinforcing the need to disseminate knowledge and carry out ongoing educational actions in the social and health spheres.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The results show that sharenting is a complex phenomenon shaped by ethical, legal, and social challenges that directly affect the comprehensive protection of children's rights in the digital environment. From this perspective, digital technologies are ambivalent: they can heighten situations of vulnerability or support protective mechanisms, depending on the context and manner in which they are used.

These findings reinforce the need to strengthen interprofessional health education actions, with an emphasis on nursing practice, aimed at promoting the conscious use of digital technologies and protecting childhood. Although the study is limited by its analysis of news stories from a restricted number of media outlets, the findings broaden understanding of the repercussions of sharenting and offer input for strengthening child protection strategies in the digital environment, as well as encouraging future research on the topic.

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Corresponding author:
Karen Stefany Pereira Celestino
UNIFACISA - Centro Universitário
R. Manoel Cardoso Palhano, 124-152 - Itararé, Campina Grande - PB, 58408-326
E-mail: karens.celestino@gmail.com

Role of Authors:
Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work - **Celestino KSP, Marcolino EC.** Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content - **Celestino KSP, Nascimento FP, Barbosa LA, Chagas ALCCA, dos Santos-Rodrigues RCS, Marcolino EC.** Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved - **Celestino KSP, Marcolino EC.** All authors approved the final version of the text.

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